

Research Tips

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Study of Latino MSM shows multiple sex partners, inconsistent condom use

A recent study of Latino men who have sex with men living in urban areas of Virginia shows that inconsistent condom use and multiple sex partners are common. Young men and those with less education, who are attracted to women, who consider themselves to be bisexual, and who hold traditional "macho" beliefs are particularly at risk.

More than half of the 291 adult men in a recent survey of Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) reported having at least two sexual partners in the three months prior to the survey. Of those who reported at least one sexual partner, about half said they were in a long-term, primary relationship, nearly all with a man, but only 43% said these relationships were monogamous.

These men were surveyed by the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University during 1999 for the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee.

In general, men who reported sex with a man outside of their primary relationship:

- engaged in both oral and anal sex, in both receptive and insertive roles.
- often said they did not know the HIV status of the men with whom they had casual sex.
- used condoms infrequently for oral sex and inconsistently for anal sex.

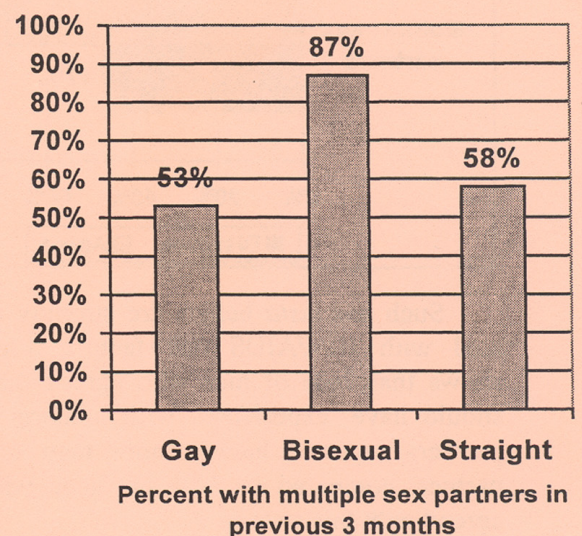
Younger men and less educated men were more likely to report risky sexual behavior.

- Of men with a high school education or less, 56% reported inconsistent condom use during anal sex compared to 25% of men with more education.
- 38% of men under 35 years old reported not always using a condom in anal sex, compared to 26% of men 35 and older.

- 78% of men under 24 reported multiple sex partners during the past three months, compared to 59% of older men.

Bisexual identity and attraction to women as well as men predicted having multiple sex partners. Figure 1 shows that bisexuals were by far the most likely to report more than one sex partner in the previous three months.

Figure 1: Multiple Partners by Sexual Identity

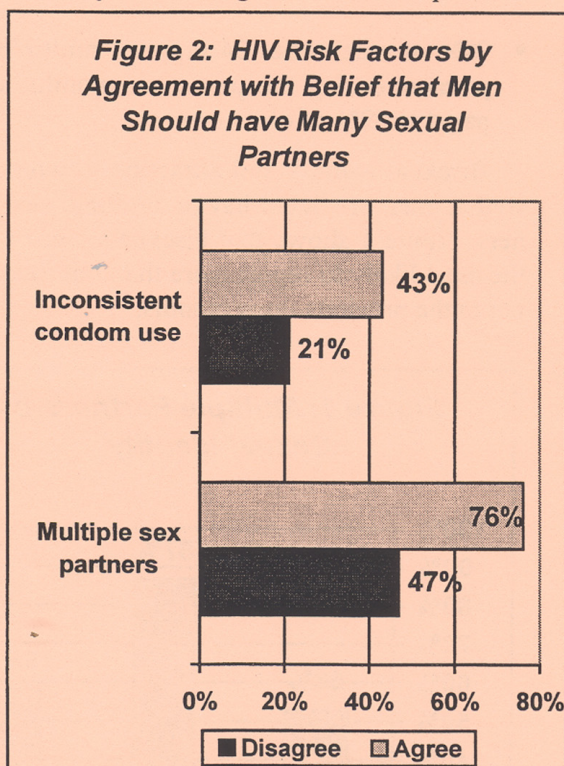


Of the men who were attracted to both men and women or mostly women, about 88% said they had multiple sex partners compared to 50% of those attracted only to men.

Of the men who said they were attracted only or mostly to men, only about a third reported inconsistent condom use, compared to 70% of men who were attracted to both men and women or mostly to women.

Machismo

Cultural studies show that an important trait of Latino culture is *machismo*, which includes the beliefs, among others, that men should have many sexual conquests, that it is acceptable to have sexual activity outside their primary relationships, and that it is natural for men to have difficulty controlling their sexual impulses.



Such *machista* beliefs are strongly associated with HIV/AIDS risk factors. Figure 2 shows that 76% of men who agreed that men should have experiences with numerous sex partners reported having more than one sex partner, compared to 47% of those who disagreed with this statement.

Data Collection

Survey participants were recruited by bilingual Latino MSM coordinators through organizations, meetings, and events attended by Latinos and through snowball techniques in which men recruited for the survey recruited others. Most surveys were completed in home parties, each usually attended by 4-6 men, through group or individual administration. Two-thirds of the sample lived in Northern Virginia, a quarter in Richmond, and the rest in Hampton Roads.

Men who agreed with this statement were also more likely to report that they do not always use condoms during anal sex.

In addition, a common explanation for not using condoms was that the men could not control their sexual "urges."

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations can be made concerning HIV/AIDS prevention and education efforts with this population:

- HIV prevention interventions need to Latino MSM as they may be at target the less educated and young increased HIV risk because of inconsistent condom use and having multiple sexual partners.
- Educational efforts need to address traditional *machista* beliefs found to be associated with HIV risk behaviors such as having multiple sexual partners -- even among those in primary, long-term relationships.
- Programs may discuss safer sex alternatives to anal sex and that perceptions of low sexual self-control may prevent men from putting on condoms.
- Educational efforts should also acknowledge the increased risk of bisexual behavior both to the man and his male and female partners.

For more information about this and other HIV/AIDS related research, contact the SERL at (804) 828-8813, 921 W. Franklin St., VCU, Richmond, VA 23284-3016, or at <http://www.vcu.edu/srl>. This project was directed by Dr. S. Lisbeth Jarama. This report was written and designed by Dr. J. David Kenamer.